

Delaware wildfire crew returns after successful trip

Delaware's wildland fire crew has returned safely to the First State after successfully battling wildfires in Colorado and Wyoming. The team arrived by bus early Friday morning at [Blackbird State Forest](#) near Smyrna just after 7 a.m.

The [Delaware Forest Service](#) dispatched the firefighters to [Colorado](#) on July 25. Their first assignment was assisting Colorado's Bureau of Land Management on the 492-acre Milk Fire near Craig, Colorado. Next, they were sent by the [Rocky Mountain Geographic Area Coordination Center](#) to the [1,287-acre Tokewanna Fire](#) near Mountain View, Wyoming. Finally, on August 4, they were dispatched to the [12,276-acre Whit Fire](#), located east of Yellowstone National Park near Cody, Wyoming. On the Whit Fire, Delaware's team worked with more than 600 personnel as they constructed hand line, patrolled fire lines, and protected structures. As of August 10, the fire was at 85 percent containment.



Delaware wildfire crew in Wyoming: **Front Row:** (left to right, holding tools) Todd W. Shaffer of Smithsburg, MD; Jeffrey A. Wilson of Clayton; Bartholomew D. Wilson of Dover; Adam N. Keever of Newark; Zachary R. Brown of Harbeson; and Monica Testa of Newark. **Back Row:** (from left) Christopher R. Valenti of Dover (back); Daniel A. Mihok of Camden (front); Charles D. Collins of Newark (back); Alexander J. Jenks of Rehoboth Beach (front); Scott A. Veasey of Millsboro; Todd D. Gsell of Townsend; Christopher S. Riale of New Castle; Nathaniel J. Sommers of Smyrna; William T. Seybold of Dover; Laura K. Yowell of Trappe, MD; Michael L. Krumrine of Magnolia; Spencer F. Valenti of Dover; and crew boss Samuel L. Topper of Federalsburg, MD.

Delaware has been dispatching a crew almost every year since 1998. Last year, Delaware sent a team to battle the [36,500-acre Fork Complex Fire](#) in northern California. Firefighters are a mix of public agency employees, recruits from volunteer fire companies, and private citizens with a keen interest in fighting wildfires. This year, four are from the Delaware Forest Service, two from DNREC Division of State Parks, one from U.S. Fish and Wildlife's Prime Hook Wildlife Area, and one from New Castle County. Six crew members are "rookies" –

i.e., marking their first assignment on a wildfire crew.



Delaware's wildfire crew work on the Tokewanna Fire in southwest Wyoming: (left to right) Michael Krumrine, Laura Yowell, Daniel Mihok, Christopher Valenti, and Nathaniel Sommers. (Photo by InciWeb.)



A photo of the Delaware wildfire crew on Wyoming's Tokewanna Fire taken on August 2. Pictured are (from left to right): Todd Shaffer, Sam Topper, Daryl Trotman, Spencer Valenti, and Bart Wilson. Firefighters made good progress as they continued to mop-up and remove hazard trees in and around structures in the Tokewanna Estates subdivision. (Photo by Nikki Testa, Delaware Forest Service)

Firefighters must prepare both mentally and physically for the annual fire season and achieve certification by the [National Wildfire Coordinating Group](#). In addition to annual training courses held in the spring, crew must complete a rigorous work-capacity test by carrying 45-pounds over a three-mile course in less than 45 minutes. Although compensated by federal funds, all members volunteer for what could become a perilous mission. Crews also helped [hurricane relief efforts for the FEMA](#) when Hurricane Irene swept through New England.

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